

Knowledge Translation Project

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ECED 531B 97A 2022S1-2: SUP SOC EMOT LRN

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July 8, 2022

Save Children With Bruised Souls & Aching Hearts

Introduction

Bullying, a form of aggression, is a common situation that makes students' lives unbearable and, in some cases, increases the chance of suicide, school withdrawal and self-loathing (Cecil & Molnar-Main, 2015). As parents and educators, we frequently encounter bullying (Denham & Burton, 1996). As Mehta et al. (2013) noted, the fact that the ones who get bullied would fear speaking up, as their minds would aggravate the bullying situation, making school a torture chamber for all students. Consequently, Mehta et al. suggested that this intimidating, harmful chaos would create a fearful atmosphere, affecting all students' adjustment and learning process. Witnessing some youths' misery closely and the horror of being bullied for years inspired me as an early childhood educator to embrace bullying-free learning environments. This paper intends both for parents and professionals who are with children and might neglect bullying because they are unaware of bullying's nature, existence or consequences. Nicholson et al. (2020) defined early childhood professionals as the personnel delivering a wide range of services, including health and family support, such as child care owners and child and family policy and advocacy organizations for young children from birth to age eight. Through this paper, I advocate for strategies that promote young children's understanding of bullying in yearly years and beyond to stand up against it, e.g., by advancing learners' social and emotional learning competencies.

This paper has three sections. In the introduction—section one, I will briefly elaborate on bullying and the effect of social and emotional learning (SEL) on bullying prevention, e.g. by enhancing children's empathy and kindness (Hawkins, 2017). In the second section, I will present an annotated bibliography of seven children's books, accompanied by a brief evaluative summary and the contributions of these books to my practice and early learning and decreasing bullying in connection to SEL. In the third section, a short review of Mayrock's book (2015) will be provided, alongside with SEL framework, the implication of Mayrock's book to my practice and my final reflections.

Section One

Social and Emotional Learning and Bullying

According to Hemmeter et al. (2013), SEL enhances social-emotional competencies—multidimensional skills enfolding self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies are essential for young children's adjustment and resolving their challenging behaviours throughout the school years and later in adulthood. Since there is a positive connection between children's challenging behaviour and their undeveloped social skills, early intervention through SEL is needed to enhance children's social competence, such as making friends easily, not being impulsive in stressful or non-stressful situations, and showing aggressive, disturbing or socially withdrawn behaviours in complicated circumstances (Hemmeter et al.; Burton & Denham, 1998).

Through establishing SEL components, such as empathy and kindness, there will be a transformation in children's behaviour (Burton & Denham, 1998). For instance, the development of empathy fosters social awareness and relationship skills, as well as care for others. According to Schonert-Reichl et al. (2012), empathy positively influences children's prosocial behaviour, which is the basis of social-emotional competencies later in the school years. A range of prosocial behaviours—behaviours through which individuals benefit others, such as sharing, helping, kindness, and cooperation are the fundamental competencies that are considered the backbone of social competence in childhood and later adulthood. Schonert-Reichl et al. suggested promoting children's prosocial behaviours, including kindness, helpfulness and empathy affect children's social and emotional early intervention and the successful prevention of aggressive behaviours such as bullying.

Bullying Through and Beyond Early Years

According to Lund et al. (2016) and the Government of BC (2021), bullying is a set of actions/behaviours by which a child who is being bullied or victimized is intentionally and continually being hurt emotionally or physically. Bullying could be presented as undesired actions, words, and/or behaviours, rooted in the differences, such as race, social status and power, physical size and strength between bullies and bullied (Government of BC; Lund et al.). The harm from bullying goes beyond school years; bullying affects students' self-esteem, e.g., their prevailing mental health and future relationships (Mehta et al., 2013).

To sum up, Early learning has a lifelong impact on children's adulthood, i.e., by creating a challenging cluster, reinforcing one struggle with another (Burton & Denham, 1998). Years of observing children have enabled me, as an early childhood educator, to re-search and see some young children who treat their peers unfairly, e.g., at snack time, they might unintentionally comment on others' food smell. Early intervention and introducing aggressive young children with social and emotional skills, such as kindness and empathy, prevent them from bullying later during their school years and adulthood (Lund et al., 2016). The main goal of this paper is to support the critical role SEL plays in bullying prevention in young children's learning process. In the following section, seven children's books, along with their implications on my practice, as well as SEL intervention and these books' impact on young readers' understanding of bullying prevention will be presented.

Section Two-Annotated Bibliography

Beer, S. (2019). *Kindness Makes Us Strong*. Hardie Grant Publishing.

This picture, the 24-page book, illustrates for young children (from one to early school age) how to practice being kind to others, e.g., sharing toys, including friends and helping others through less, simple but powerful words. This book beautifully pictures all acts of kindness on how to be inclusive and make the world a better place for all, even though it is as simple as saying hello to others.

As Denham and Burton (1996) suggested, young children might find it challenging to approach others whom they do not know for play or make relationships initially. By advancing children's emotional competence and ability to establish friendships, children discover how to respond to others emotionally, simultaneously and strategically according to their perceptions of their and others' emotions. Expression of

their emotions is the other aspect children learn while they cooperate with their peers, through negotiations, exchanges of ideas and regulating their emotional experiences. Finally, through reading books, such as *Kindness Makes Us Strong*, children get introduced to empathy and kindness, e.g., being happy for others' success or cheering up someone in pain or fear.

The implication of the book to my practice was extensive as this book uses not many words and more pictures to convey the meaning of kindness, empathy and compassion to very young readers (e.g., children join in reading based on their understandings and discuss the book effectively from its illustrations).

Brooks, F., & Ferraro, M. (2020). *All About Friends*. Usborn Publishing.

As the title of this 32-page book implies, it is a road map for preschoolers and kindergarteners to establish friendships, from defining real friends and how to make them to how to come out of not healthy friendships and fix relationships with friends. As this book suggested, friendship is a valuable and irreplaceable support for everyone who is looking to have more fun beyond being by themselves, e.g., friends share things (e.g., toys), thoughts, treats, feelings, and even secrets. The book goes over the reasons one needs friends for in detail, for instance, borrowing things, playing together and having fun, brainstorming ideas, learning new things and making each other feel good about themselves. Through all the examples this book provides, children realize the ways to make their friendships deeper (e.g., by complementing each other); by distinguishing a good friend from not helpful ones (e.g., listening to one another; apologizing once making a mistake), and standing up for one another if another person is unkind to them.

The implications of the book to my practice are provoking children's positive relationships through SEL, e.g., group activity engagement and individual reflections of children through storytelling or drawing and documenting their thoughts.

Cook, J. (2013). *Tease Monster: A Book About Teasing vs. Bullying*. Boys Town Press.

Through this 32-page book, students 5-12 years of age get introduced to the difference between bullying and teasing, as at times, these concepts might become blurry and heartbreaking. "One of a kind" illustrates for young readers the differences between individuals, e.g., the way one eats, the foods one chooses, the choices of colours and all the differences that make people unique and special, as each person is "the one".

Although One of a kind is so proud of himself, as soon as friends start to bully him, he starts to reveal his feelings (e.g., sadness, embarrassment, and humiliation) about his

differences and that not all the differences seem fine to him anymore, for instance, his big feet that until then were so special to him started to make him feel insecure because of friends' negative comments and laughs. By such examples, this book gently brings forward new ideas for children, such as disability, cultural differences, and race to consider, even while they try to tease to cheer up their friends. By implementing this book into my practice, I employ SEL components such as self-awareness and social awareness by which children learn to differentiate bullying and teasing from one another in different situations as they are close to each other and hard to distinguish at times; e.g., in difficult situations, such as sharing toys or taking turns, taking the opportunity discussing with children about their emotions and others' thoughts and feelings.

Marley, C. (2019). *Get up, Stand up*. Chroniclekids Books.

Deviating injustice and lifting others up with kind support and compassion are the main focus of this book. Through this book, kindergarteners and young school-aged children get familiar with the concept of peace, love and truth. Saying no to bullying, and the ways to stand up for their rights and speak up are illustrated perfectly for children in this book, e.g., if another child gets their toy or threatens them, by having conversations they can speak up for themselves and others. In addition, this book represents how important it is to support the ones who are bullied by offering help and comfort and not joining the bullies. The main message of the book as the title implies is inviting everyone to "get up, stand up," as everyone has the power to make a difference in the unfair world.

I found this book very relevant for kindergarteners and preschoolers in terms of familiarizing themselves with bullying and its prevention. By implementing this book to my practice, my kindergarteners will have an idea of how harsh bullying sounds like to others, how to stand up against it and the ways they can support if they witness one bullying others, e.g., by reporting to an adult alongside showing love and affection to the bullied.

Martineau, S. (2012). *Dealing With Bullying*. Smart Apple Media.

This 32-page book introduces young school-aged children to the concept of bullying, how bullying happens, the feelings one experiences due to being bullied and looking from both lenses of being a bully and someone who gets bullied. Additionally, the book critically invites children to reflect on distinct forms of bullying and what it takes to be

a bully, e.g., hurting others physically or emotionally: hitting others as well as saying nasty words (e.g., giving others nicknames).

Through the book, children learn some games to practice kindness, e.g., the name game in which children write their names on a piece of paper, without looking they pick a name and share three good things (e.g., friendly, helpful, and kind) about each other.

The guide Martineau (2012) provides for children is not to fight back, or keep bullying to themselves, but rather to speak up or talk with a trustworthy friend or adult.

As Hawkins (2017) put forward, for familiarizing children with social justice concepts, the learning environment should consider children as active participants in the social construction of their worlds rather than passive learners who function based on an egocentric level. As such, and as Martineau suggested, I implement this book into my practice by familiarizing children with the concept of bullying, enabling them to internalize the real hurt one could feel as the result of bullying, i.e., sometimes one does not want to be a bully but unintentionally and unknowingly says things that might hurt others' feelings. For instance, we discuss and model what to do in case someone uses power over us (e.g., talk with another friend) or come to the consciousness that our words and actions might hurt others unintentionally.

Mayrock, A. (2015). *The Survival Guide to Bullying: Written by a Teen*. Scholastic Inc.

This 160-page book provides school-aged students with the support they need throughout their early years of school to find their power back. I found this book a medium for understanding bullying and as a transition beyond the early years and the continuum of the other reviewed books toward having a bullying-free zone. As an educator in my day-to-day work with young children, I observe the challenges some children experience dealing with bullies. Each line of this book puts the SEL framework into practice, with an ongoing learning opportunity for children to grow and not to feel stuck, i.e. that those who get bullied are not alone and there is always support nearby (parents, teachers, and friends).

I chose this book for a longer review summary for the following reasons. First, I found this book very applicable to the learning environment, e.g., it pictures a variety of scenarios of bullying, and suffering and helps children get their autonomy back. Second, it is not addressed only for children but for adults, teachers and parents, to know the hardships children go through while dealing with bullying and the way adults can support students. The implication of this book to my practice is to ask all parents and educators to add this book to their book collection. Another implication to my practice is reading the

book myself over and over again and finding out the ways I can encourage children to become their own superheroes, e.g., not belittling themselves from a young age (switching negative sentences three-year-olds might use daily that undermine their self-esteem to positive self-talk and growth mindset).

Zietlow Miller, P. (2018). *Be Kind*. Roaring Books Press.

This 32-page picture book introduces young readers (3-6 yrs) to be kind and invites them to think about how to be kind. As the Government of BC (2021) suggested, not all the time being kind sounds effortless and sensible for everyone, and this might be even more challenging for youngsters. For example, sharing, taking turns, and other social interactions might make them nervous and agitative, triggering the child to be an aggressor. Through reading such a book, children grasp the knowledge of being kind to others, i.e., by contemplating the ways to be kind and empathic to others. The character of the book goes over every choice one could have to be compassionate about another person. For instance, she thinks of being kind as the form of pouring juice all over herself to distract others from a hurt friend, being generous to someone else and giving them her shoes, or giving cookies to a person who lives alone. Other sentiments the child in the book explores to illustrate kindness for young readers go deeper: the form of kindness to be attentive, e.g., saying someone's name, to include new people, e.g., playing with new friends, or listening actively to people who need to be heard. I implement this book as the model for my program; through the SEL this book puts forward, and according to Schonert-Reichl et al. (2012), children's social and emotional understanding increases alongside their prosocial behaviours which leads to less aggression and being kinder to others, and themselves.

Section Three-Book Review

The "Survival Guide to Bullying: Written by a Teen" covers the CASEL (2020) framework's five competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making). This book, by implementing SEL, gives a chance to the readers, adults or children, to look through the lens of being bullied, to probe the ways effectively impact bullying and save students or themselves with bruised souls and aching hearts. Besides, I brought this book, as a resource for parents and educators to see being bullied from a young person's perspective and recognize the ways of help and support for both bullies and being bullied. Through nine chapters, as a person who went through bullying herself, Mayrock (2015) introduces all the details of bullying, e.g., how it happens, the feelings, and the ways to end the ongoing bullying battle in the mind of the bullied. The

book fits into the CASEL's (2020) framework: to support learners with the help of SEL—the process through which they acquire and apply the knowledge and skills to a better self, by managing emotions and feeling others' emotions as well as themselves and by keeping relationships and making caring decisions. Mayrock offers simple and unique solutions that fit into SEL (e.g., emphasizing one's role in determining their day-to-day self-fulfilment and a sense of purpose), to speak up and not feel stuck or alone.

Chapter one, “why me: because you are a normal kid” reviews the basis of being bullied, being quiet, polite, creative and yourself (the “you” in this book review is the collective you). The reasons for being bullied Mayrock (2015) listed are many, which end with “no reason at all.” Marock also stated it is not the students who get bullied who have problems, but rather it is bullies' personalities and personal challenges that drive them to be a bully. Hence, Marock asks the ones being bullied to be aware of their uniqueness and not to blame themselves for being bullied, the principles that are suggested in CASEL (2020) through self-management and self-awareness, e.g., by identifying emotions, a sense of purpose and perseverance.

In chapter two, “the old you: stuck in an act,” Mayrock (2015) elaborated on the necessity of fitting in and that, as a student being bullied for years, remembered she did everything to resemble the bullies, e.g., she changed her clothing or talking, yet they would bully her beside herself bullying her entire existence, i.e., by pretending to be another person. Mayrock suggested the ways of transformation from a “fake you to a real you” with whom you feel content through three tests: checking on you in general, your school, and social media. Finally, Mayrock wraps up this chapter by empowering the readers and reminding them that they are in control of their days and choices, which is in accordance with CASEL's (2020) responsible decision-making principle, e.g., considering one's role to promote individual and collective well-being.

In chapter three, “the real you”, Mayrock emphasized realizing the importance of one's individuality and that brings forward everyone's real self through a transition, e.g., by boosting everyone's confidence in themselves and by self-care, i.e., looking more closely at their health (exercise, eating healthy, getting enough sleep). Another suggestion Mayrock noted is to go further and for students to trust their intelligence (e.g. by finding something they like and being a pro in it) and not judge themselves based on bullies' hurtful actions/words/behaviours. Believing in oneself and acting like themselves is the way Mayrock put forward for those who get bullied to know that they are as important, smart and

talented as they have been before being bullied which goes with the CASEL's (2020) framework on self-awareness.

In the next chapter, the fourth one, Mayrock (2015) introduced methods of getting help, through working on their relationship skills which are in accordance with CASEL (2020) and by becoming their own superhero. Mayrock shared how she would feel as an eight-year-old who was bullied, i.e., not communicating with her parents due to blaming herself as the source of bullying (e.g., believing in what bullies called her) and lack of communication capability (e.g., not knowing her emotions and being able to tell her parents how frustrated she was). Mayrock stated some ways to open up the discussions with parents and with a better understanding, including drawing pictures, and writing letters or songs/poems. Based on 's personal experiences, parents are the medium of communication between those who are bullied and the school. Therefore, it is better for students to find a way to talk with their parents for help.

Social awareness, perspective-taking, empathy and compassion, expressing gratitude and a sense of belonging are the CASEL's (2020) principles that are implemented through the next chapter of the book—Fears. The “fears” a student who is bullied might experience, e.g., having no friends (solution: tell yourself this is temporary by expanding your social horizons, such as joining a club out of school). also suggested other solutions for students to overcome their fears, such as going to therapy, practicing to be a dreamer, imagining yourself in ten years, your job or house—talking to your future you or going outside or for a walk. Mayrock highlighted the critical role one plays in the successful transition from being someone who is bullied to the real “one”. There is a variety of battlefields of time and space bullied should build their battle plan for, classroom, hallway and before or after school. Mayrock recommended no matter what students do, optimize their safety and feel comfortable.

Final Thoughts and the Implications of this Book to My Practice

As an early childhood educator, I employ the strategies that have been offered in this book that are in accordance with CASEL (2020). For example, on daily basis, I familiarize children with different emotions, the best ways to communicate about them and whom to talk to about these emotions, i.e., by modelling conversations and talking about educators' emotions. In addition, once I spot a conflict that is out of children's control, I intervene with some strategies (mostly modelling and supporting children's communication skills) to show them how to speak up if, for example, a friend is being bossy or not waiting for their turn. Lastly, I introduce this book to all educators and parents to spread the word, especially to

immigrant parents, as many adults are not familiar with bullying nor know how to support their children in dealing with bullying.

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